



Special points of interest:

- How it all started
- Initial vision and development overview
- What's the difference?
- Current progress

Middle School vs. Jr. High

Special Report to Board of Directors

October, 2007

Middle schoolers aren't "miniature" high schoolers. They aren't "grown up" elementary students either. Their developmental needs are unique and need to be addressed as such. OCMS has a distinct philosophical approach to education for children ages 10-13. This approach is designed specifically for the student who is changing from childhood into adolescence... and is facing adulthood in the near future.

How it all started!

More than ten years ago, Garry Den Besten (as a result of the encouragement and direction of the School Board) challenged the 6-8 staff to begin implementing the middle school concept. The initial implementation included a packet put together by Garry, along with considerable material gleaned and customized for Ontario Christian.

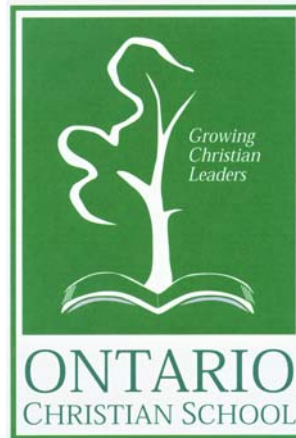
The beginning years resulted in considerable growing pains and teachers felt ill-equipped to be able to make the transition from a Jr. High to a Middle School. Many of the initial changes included those traditionally used by youth ministries and a number of teachers felt overwhelmed as each day they were encouraged to provide a small group setting, which included ice-breakers, team building games,

and a variety of strategies to show students they were important and had an adult advocate.

Nikki Kuiper was initially challenged with heading up the implementation strategies. After one year, Bob DeGroot came on as MS Principal/Assistant K-6 Principal and took on the transition

that had already started. Since his initial year as MS Principal (1998-99), the process of implementing the MS concepts in a way that uniquely fit Ontario Christian's 7th and 8th graders has been steadily progressing. Thankfully, there were several teachers who not only understood the difference between a Jr. High and a Middle School, but they took on a variety of roles in helping make it happen.

Starting this process with 160 students and 3 sections of each grade and seeing it worked out as OCMS grew to its present 245 students with 5 sections of 7th and 4 of 8th, also presented a unique set of challenges. We remain dedicated toward working out the middle school concepts in a way that is unique to Ontario Christian Middle School.



...the whole kid, ...the whole time, ...with our whole heart!

Vision and Development Overview—March, 2001

Ontario Christian Middle School provides quality, biblical, God-centered education that centers on the intellectual, social, emotional, moral, physical, and spiritual developmental needs of young adolescents. Each developmental area (intellectual, social, emotional, moral, physical, and spiritual) was researched and an intentional plan was put together to address OCMS students in each area. In addition, the Vision and Development

Overview included the promise to provide quality staff and encourage the pursuit of excellence. Again, specific concepts were included. The final area this report included was that of fostering relationships between home, church and school. This report was given to each staff member and made available to the OC School Board.

As each developmental area

was fleshed out, many unique middle school concepts were intentionally included as a way to keep us focused as we proceeded. Examples included student exploration, integrative curriculum, positive school climate, personal and love-filled relationships, positive staff environment, and open communication. We were "well on our way" in our pursuit of becoming a "true" middle school.

What's the Difference?

Major Distinctions Between the Middle School and the Junior High School

1. MS is student centered — JH is subject centered
2. MS fosters collaboration and empowerment of teachers and students — JH fosters competition and empowerment of administrators
3. MS focuses on creative exploration and experimentation of subject matter — JH focuses on mastery of concepts and skills in separate disciplines
4. MS allows for flexible scheduling with large blocks of time — JH requires a regular six-period day of 50-55 minute periods
5. MS varies length of time students are in courses — JH offers subjects for one semester or one year
6. MS encourages multi-materials approach to instruction — JH depends on textbook-oriented instruction
7. MS organizes teachers on interdisciplinary teams with common planning time period — JH organizes teachers in departments with

10 Plus 3

13 Major Differences

8. MS arranges work spaces of teamed teachers adjacent to one another — JH arranges work spaces of teachers according to disciplines taught
9. MS emphasizes both affective and cognitive development — JH emphasizes only cognitive development of student
10. MS offers advisor/advisee teacher-oriented guidance program — JH offers study hall and access to counselor upon request
11. MS provides high-interest "mini-courses" during school day — JH provides highly structured activity program after school
12. MS uses varied delivery systems with high level of interaction among students and teachers — JH uses lecture styles a majority of the time with high percentage of teacher talk time
13. MS organizes athletics around intramural concept — JH organizes athletics around interscholastic concept

**Eight
Conditions &
Six Components
Present in a
True Middle
School**

8 Conditions & **6** Program Components

1. Educators committed to young adolescents
2. Courageous, collaborative leadership
3. A shared vision that guides decisions
4. An inviting, supportive, and safe environment (positive school climate)
5. High expectations for all
6. Students and teachers engaged in active learning
7. An adult advocate for every student
8. School-initiated family and community partnership
3. Assessment and evaluation programs that promote quality learning
4. Organizational structures that support meaningful relationships and learning
5. School-wide efforts and policies that foster health, wellness, and safety
6. Multi-faceted guidance and support services

What are we doing right at OCMS? **How Are We Doing?**

(stuff already put in place)

- Both 7th & 8th graders have only 4 teachers for the 5 core subjects, rather than 5 as in previous, Junior High years.
- Previous to adding a 5th section of students, 7th graders had only 3 teachers for the 5

core subjects

- 7th teaches 2 inter-disciplinary units: Star unit and Human Body. In addition, a unit on the Romans (culminating in the Roman Museum) is taught in conjunction with the 8th grade.
- 8th teaches 2 inter-disciplinary units: Christian Service and Who Am I? The Who Am I



- unit is focused on helping students stand up for and explain their faith. The service unit enables students to design and implement service projects throughout the year (sponsored by Student Council, Advisement and Exploratory classes)
- 8th graders take one day each fall to focus on leadership and discipleship training, then build on

How are we doing... continued.

- this throughout the year.
- 8th graders take one day to devote to Service.
- Middle school teachers publicly recognize leadership, discipleship, and service exhibited by students with monthly awards.
- Middle school teachers privately recognize these same qualities by sending postcards to students.
- Middle school teachers take time each week during team time to pray for students.
- Middle school advisement teachers contact families new to OCMS within the first weeks of school - to establish a personal connection and positive communication.
- Student council empowers students to lead peers in 3 areas: Building community, Provide service opportunities, Encouraging faith development. 26 students meet 3 times a week to do this.
- TEAMS have developed a working curriculum map over all subject areas. This allows us

to weave connections across the curriculum all year long. This map allows us to find the gaps and overlaps in our teaching. We discuss weaknesses in certain skill areas and brainstorm ways to improve both our teaching and assessment methods.

- We make connections across the curriculum by developing essential questions related to each subject area. We teach persuasive essay across the curriculum touching on it in History as we study the five pillars of Islam, in Science as students are challenged to write about cloning, and in Bible. We use the theme of Character and Character Traits to integrate Bible, English and History. Teachers use the topic of "Finding Purpose in Life" to integrate units in English, History, and Bible.

Characteristics of Effective Middle Level Teachers

- A sense of humor
- Flexibility in instructional and cur-

ricular planning and delivery

- Ability to actively listen to students
- Ability to show unconditional caring for young adolescents
- A contagious passion for learning
- A willingness to move beyond the boundaries of your subject area training
- A philosophy and action plan that places students at the center of the learning process
- A belief in the process of collaborating with students regarding instruction and curriculum
- The confidence to guide students on their path to learning
- A strong sense of your own identity
- A wealth of knowledge about young adolescent development
- A belief in all students' ability to succeed
- Knowledge and skills to help all students achieve success
- Awareness of adolescent health issues, and a willingness to address these issues with students

Teacher Initiated Challenges— one or two changes right now!

A few things we could change right now...

- More flexible schedule
- Interdisciplinary, integrated instruction
- Keep improving our TEAMS
- More intentional team teaching—units happening at the same time
- More opportunities to get involved in the surrounding community (mission/service emphasis)
- Intentionally make our curriculum relevant
- Include more learning styles in my teaching
- More emphasis on responsible decision-making by students
- Elimination of overlap in varied subject areas
- Coordination of assignments

- Keep working at making our interdisciplinary teaming quality. There are many advantages for teachers and students (as opposed to keeping our instruction single dimensional). We are working hard at this and see the positive results. Curriculum mapping has helped keep us on track.

OCMS Where We're Headed

A Middle School has a distinct philosophical approach to education for children ages 10-13. This approach is designed specifically for the student who is changing from childhood into adolescence. The focus of middle school education is to provide students with a variety of exposures and experiences as they seek to see God revealed throughout His creation. The Middle School is designed to provide a smooth transition from the elementary

to the secondary school years as well as a gradual change from dependence to independence.

- Our school is working hard at meeting the unique needs and characteristics of the young adolescent (middle schooler). Teachers work closely to stress the development of the whole



If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there!

child and enhance a student's social, emotional, physical, and spiritual growth. The Middle School philosophy asserts that every student must be well known by at least one adult in school.

- Our teachers are knowledgeable about and committed to the young adolescent.

MIDDLE SCHOOL VS. JR. HIGH

- Our curriculum provides a planned transition from the child-centered (affective) elementary school to the content-centered (cognitive) high school. Close contact between teacher and student is maintained while giving increased freedom and independence to the student.
- Our teachers use varied instructional strategies.
- Our students have a class that is committed to instructing them in responsible Christian living.
- Our school is working on having interdisciplinary teams of teachers to coordinate the teaching skills and subject content. Students must see that all learning is inter-related.
- Our school uses a block master schedule from time to time and is pursuing ways to use that more effectively.
- Our school has a strong core curriculum as well as opportunities for exploration in other areas of interest to the adolescent student. Students are encouraged to study a variety of subjects or topics and look at areas outside the basic course of study.

Our Middle School provides experiences which help students identify their interest areas and aptitudes.

Where we're headed!

- Our teachers have both team planning and personal planning times.
- Our school works hard at shared decision-making where the closest to the "client" are involved in the decision-making process of the school.
- Our Middle School has a curriculum in place that teaches how to study, how to do research, how to explore, how to be organized, and how to learn. Emphasis is placed on how and where to find information from books and other media.
- Our Middle School provides opportunity for student-student instruction as part of the instructional program. Students work in learning groups to solve math problems, complete science experiments, work on projects, etc.
- Our school provides opportunities for students to interact in group activities to foster social development, develop leadership, and learn cooperation. Social experiences exist that help students learn to understand and control emotions while working in a group.
- Our school is working on a high-quality extra-curricular program including intramurals and interest-based mini-courses.
- Our school has a well-developed TEAM process with exceptional TEAM leaders.
- Our school has a well developed Advisement Program where students meet four times each week for spiritual, social, and emotional encouragement—another way we grow Christian leaders.



TEAM LEADERS

Two experienced TEAM leaders each give 10 hours per week as they develop agendas, lead meetings, keep minutes, design and implement Advisement curriculum, arrange and lead student/parent conferences, follow up on discipline as needed, promote communication between staff/students/parents regarding tardies, incompletes, etc., plan and facilitate professional staff development, facilitate communication and coordination with other TEAMS, assist in making MS schedule, promote interdisciplinary, integrated approaches to curriculum, communicate with administration regarding curriculum issues... so much to do, so little time!



Advisement is a full year experience for all our middle school students. Advisement meets four times a week. These sessions are essentially non-academic and not graded. Our advisement activities are planned to strengthen and encourage students, keeping in mind their unique, early adolescent social, spiritual, and emotional needs.

The goal of the program is to develop skills for personal assessment, social interaction, study skills, time management, and spiritual growth. At Ontario Christian Middle School, we firmly believe in teaching the whole child, caring for the heart, as well as instructing the mind. Advisement meetings foster a sense of belonging to a particular group, and also serve as a source of intra-school spirit competitions. Our advisory program is based on the belief that "Every student

Advisement

needs at least one thoughtful adult who has the time and takes the trouble to talk with the student about academic matters, personal problems, and the importance of performing well in middle grade school." (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development 1989)

The emphasis of the Advisement Program is developing a one-to-one relationship between advisor and student that encourages communication and keeps staff informed of the needs and concerns of students. The advisors' goal is to maintain strong communication between home and school regarding all aspects of the child's experience at school. Advisors meet with parents and students twice yearly for goal setting and monitoring of progress. Parents or students throughout the school year may contact advisors. When

needed, advisors make contact with classroom teachers and support staff. Open and prompt communication leads to strong home and school relationships, as together we serve Christ for the benefit of His children.

- Work
- Individualized attention
- Involvement
- Conferencing
- Individual Goal Setting
- Educational Planning
- Teaching Study Skills & Time Management
- Spiritual Mentoring
- Open Communication
- Role-Modeling
- Listening
- Being an advocate
- Team Building
- Leading Discussions
- Service
- Intramurals